

## **The Adversary** by RJPepper

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**Summary:** Things were beginning to look up for the small town of Hawkins, Indiana... or so it seemed. Another string of incidents slowly flooding the surface, threaten to turn the whole town upside down (again). With a new monster, comes an adventure that almost nobody is prepared for.

# 1. Chapter 1: Upside Right

*"There are times when all the world's asleep. The questions run too deep. For such a simple man. Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned. I know it sounds absurd, please tell me who I am..." -The Logical Song by Supertramp, 1979*

## Chapter One: Upside Right

*A cold darkness surrounds Steve Harrington as he walks along a path he's unsure of. Shivering and afraid, he slowly presses on. "Nancy! Dustin?!" he calls out desperate for an answer. "Anybody..." he dejectedly trails off to himself. He feels someone, something, following him. With a loud crack, he discovers it isn't far behind anymore and reluctantly turns to face it. A tall shadow with glowing eyes sends him into a paralyzed fear. It extends an arm as if beckoning him to go with it.*

"NO!" Steve wakes up screaming from yet another terrible dream. He takes a few deep breaths to calm down, he can feel his heart racing in his chest. The nightmares began after El closed the gate and they've gotten progressively worse since then. It's always the same one about a tall, misty shadow man. He hasn't talked to anyone about it, summing things up to PTSD which he can somehow get over on his own. He's suffered in silence for a whole month now. It hasn't helped that his parents left for Hawaii a week ago, without him. See, they had planned their annual family vacation before Steve had a plate smashed over his head and his face beaten in by Billy Hargrove, which caused a concussion. Even if it wasn't against doctor's orders, he still probably would've opted out of a trip. He needed to stay here in case the kids needed him, in case the upside down somehow opened up again.

The emptiness of the house never got to him before and he was determined to not let it get to him now. "It's a dream, it can't hurt you man." He says as he stares into the bathroom mirror splashing his face with water. His reflection shows a worn down version of himself. He knows he needs to start sleeping more, but four hours was all he could seem to manage lately. Slowly drudging back to bed he looks over at the wall clock, it's 6:30 a.m. and he already has to start getting ready for another school day.

After parking his BMW in the Hawkins High parking lot, he takes a moment to rest his head on the steering wheel. He thought he could keep doing this, but doubt is making it's merry way into his head. Can holiday break get here any sooner? Just a few more days is all he has to wait.

"Steve?" A voice near the driver side window causes him to nearly jump out of his skin. He sighs in relief when he sees that it's only Nancy. Of course, Jonathan isn't too far behind peering over her shoulder.

"Hey there." He awkwardly scratches the back of his neck. "How's it, going?"

"Are you okay? That's the second time we've seen you passed out in your car." He laughs a little too loud causing her to raise an eyebrow with concern.

"That? I'm fine." He dismisses her concern as he steps out of the car. "House has been empty for a while now and I'm just having trouble sleeping. You know?" She nods in understanding. She bought it, a small mental victory for Steve. Now wouldn't be the right time to explain the true reason for his insomnia. Where would he even start without sounding weak?

"Right, your parents. I'm sorry about that. Nobody should have to spend the holiday's alone." He just shrugs it off like it doesn't bother him at all. He'd prefer if nobody knew about his situation, but of course word gets around in this damned town.

"It's really okay, I'll uh, talk to you guys later." He digs his hands in his pockets and walks toward the crowded entrance, leaving them behind. He hates to admit it, but it's still hard for him to be around Nancy. Especially with Jonathan there. He still has feelings he hasn't completely let go of yet.

The day went by in a blink as he nearly fell asleep in most of his classes and fell completely asleep in Spanish. He only woke up because the teacher tapped his neck with a ruler, causing the whole class to laugh. That would've bothered the old Steve, but he knows better than to sweat the little things now. Hell on Earth exists; high

school is nothing. By the end of his last class he actually gained some energy and is feeling good. He's walking down the hall with a smile for the first time in a while when he feels his books get slammed out of his hands. This almost causes him to trip and he glares at the perpetrator.

"Watch where you're going Harrington. I'd hate to mess up that pretty face again." Billy practically spits while continuing in the opposite direction. Steve rolls his eyes and bends over to pick up the books scattered across the floor. This became an every day thing after the whole incident. Even though Steve didn't want to press charges, his parents got one look at his face and demanded that something be done. They chose then of all times to care. Long story short, the least Chief Hopper could do was issue Billy mandated anger management courses. Clearly they aren't working because he's been taking out his aggression on Steve for getting him stuck there on weekends.

Grateful for the lack of basketball practice today, Steve shoves his books into his locker and heads back out into the cold. It's snowing and seems to have snowed four inches since school started. He shivers and blows air over his hands as he turns on the heat in his car. While he waits for it to warm up, he turns up the radio. "When Doves Cry" is playing clearly and then it starts to go static. In confusion he tries changing it, but everything is suddenly static and his ears are ringing. The noise is so unbearable that he covers his ears and cringes. Squinting through the pain he manages to see it. In the distance, about four cars away, is the man. As if floating on a cloud of mist above the snow, the monster from his dreams slowly moves towards him with glowing eyes. Panic hits, he locks the doors, and quickly puts the car in reverse. A car beeps it's horn loudly as he almost backs into it pulling out, but he manages to speed out of the parking lot unscathed.

Breathing heavily, he begins to relax as school disappears behind him and music returns to the radio. He slows down a little and turns the windshield wipers on. The snow is making it hard to see, but in the distance he notices four blobs moving through the snow up ahead. He pulls up beside them slowly and rolls the window down.

"Steve." Dustin nods a hello trying to play it cool.

"Just get in the car you losers." He shakes his head, what were they even thinking in this weather?

"Yes sir." He enthusiastically calls shotgun and races to the passenger seat.

"Yeah, you don't gotta ask me twice." Lucas says hopping in the backseat with a smiling Will in tow. Mike takes a moment longer, but eventually rolls his eyes and joins his friends.

"Do you want to tell me why you guys are attempting to walk home in this?" Dustin went off on a tangent about how they missed the bus because they planned on riding their bikes home, but it snowed more than they thought it would.

"More than YOU, thought it would." Lucas shakes his head. "I told you I heard the weather this morning."

"OH SUE ME."

Steve just listens to all of them blame each other for missing the bus with a smile. The banter makes him feel sane and safe for a moment. He almost forgets that some creature is after him, he was just scared out of his mind and as much as he hates it, he'll actually have to ask for help soon.

## 2. Book Boy & Shoe Girl

*"Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride. Nobody gonna slow me down, oh no I got to keep on movin'. Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride. I'm running and I won't touch ground. Oh no, I got to keep on movin'..." - Break My Stride by Matthew Wilder, 1983*

### Chapter 2: Book Boy Shoe Girl

"Here you are sweet stuff, I'd give it a minute. Don't need to burn your tongue." Ethel places Steve's usual coffee on the counter in front of him. The older woman has worked at Doug's for as long as he can remember. She's like the grandma he always wanted. You know, if you could choose family.

"Thanks." He smiles as warm as the heat radiating off the mug.

"Now, what brings you in here so late?" She puts her hands on her hips and he shakes his head.

"Can't sleep, college applications are really getting to me." This was at least part truth. It's been near impossible for him to think of what he wants to do once he graduates and that stresses him out quite a bit. The truth is, after dropping off the kids, he had driven to the police station. He wanted to tell Hopper everything, but thought about how ridiculous it would sound considering nothing had actually hurt him yet. He sat outside for twenty minutes before just driving home. He distracted himself with homework and T.V. for a while, but when 12 a.m. came around, he just couldn't stand the darkness alone. He needed to get out and decided that his favorite diner would be safe. It's a short drive outside of town, but worth the trip. Not too many places in Hawkins can compare to it.

"I'm sure you'll get in somewhere. If not, you're young and got your whole life ahead of ya' kiddo. Just keep your head up and promise me you'll get some sleep." She ruffles his hair.

"I'll try, okay?" He laughs and takes a small sip of coffee. He happens to look over her shoulder and notices a guy he's never seen before sitting alone in a booth. He's got to be around his age, but he couldn't

be from Hawkins. With a tall slender build, high cheekbones, prominent jawline, wavy shag cut honey hair and porcelain skin; he looks like he just stepped out of some movie or fashion magazine. His round blue eyes are intently focused on the book before him. Is it a school book or something more interesting?

"Why don't you go say hi? He's been reading that book for an hour now, could probably use a break." She squeezes his shoulder before walking away with a few dishes to wash. Steve can feel his face heat up. He hadn't meant to stare and certainly didn't intend on being called out for it. Why was he staring anyway? He hadn't felt this way since the first time he noticed Nancy. It can't be the same feeling though, this isn't a girl. He sighs and tries to drink his coffee faster. On top of everything going on in his life, he didn't need to add confusion to the list. Maybe it's the lack of sleep mixing up his emotions. Yeah, that's what he'll go with. He pulls out his wallet, leaves his money under the mug and hurries to his car without saying goodbye.

Starting the drive back to town fills his mind with questions. Who was he even becoming? Where were the answers that used to come so easily? What if he's going crazy? How does he get himself back to a state of normalcy?

"Keep it together, just keep it together." He says aloud, gripping the steering wheel tighter as he drives on. Before he knows it, he's back in Hawkins. It's got to be about 2:30 a.m. and the streets are eerily empty. A streetlight flickers. "A coincidence." Another one flickers as he drives past. Then another one. "Shit, shit, shit." He's so distracted by the lights that he has to slam on his breaks when he notices a person just standing in the middle of the street. His heart is nearly beating out of his chest at this point. Suddenly, the lights get so bright that he has to cover his eyes. "WHAT IS HAPPENING?!" The lights explode with a loud pop and the shattered glass falls to the street like rain. He opens his eyes, shocked to see a woman standing there with her arms raised. He tries to take in as much detail as he can in this split second. African American, wild curly hair, short, possibly mid-teens and missing a shoe? She's gone as fast as he can blink. He rubs his eyes a few times. Did that really just happen? Where the fuck did she go? He presses his foot to the gas. He wasn't

certain about much anymore, but he knew he couldn't ignore this. He knew where he was going.

He knocks frantically at the door and holds his breath as he hears someone coming. How do his footsteps manage to sound grumpy?

"Look kid, I like you, but there better be a damn good reason you woke me up." Hopper answers the door and stands there with his arms crossed.

"I was driving home, all the street lights on Woodburn just exploded. And-and there was this girl who was just standing in front of my car. I swear she did it somehow, I didn't know where else to go." The chief's eyebrows furrow with concern at his story as annoyance seems to dissipate.

"Okay, that's a pretty good reason. Did you see where she went?" He shakes his head.

"No, I blinked and she was just... gone." He's still shaken up by the whole experience. "I remember exactly what she looked like, maybe we could do a sketch or something."

"In the morning we'll get that done at the station." He looks over Steve and notices how jumpy he is. When was the last time this kid slept? He wondered if something more was eating at him. There was no way he was letting him drive home like this though. "Uh, the couch folds out into a bed. Why don't you stay here til' morning? You look like shit." He thinks about it before deciding that he'd rather stay here than alone in his large dark prison of a house.

"Are you sure? I mean, I can still drive."

"It's fine, come on." Hopper leads him into the house and helps him make a useable bed as quiet as possible. They didn't want to wake up El who was only a couple of rooms away. Within minutes of laying down Steve finds himself falling asleep with no problem. It might be the weirdest thing to happen yet.



### 3. What Happened on Woodburn?

#### Chapter 3: What Happened on Woodburn?

The snow outside had stopped falling, but it accumulated to a fair amount upon the ground outside. Dustin Henderson gapes at it from his window and marathon sprints to the small radio on his dresser. He tunes it, trying to get a news station. "Come on, come on!" He eventually finds a station that's listing school closings. He closes his eyes and crosses his fingers.

*"Hawkins Elementary, Hawkins Middle..."* That's all he needed to hear to break out into a victory cheer.

"YES! SNOWDAY!" He hurriedly changes into some winter gear and darts into the living room, where his mom is just getting done on the phone.

"That was Lucas, apparently your friends are all meeting at Mike's house. Be careful! Love you!" She calls after Dustin as he shoves his coat on.

"Got it! Love you too mom!" He's out the door and halfway down the driveway.

"Wait Dusty!" His mom calls from the door.

"What?" He groans impatiently. She tosses him a banana which he almost drops in the snow.

"You didn't have any breakfast!" He puts it in his backpack and yells a thanks before trekking off to Mike's house in the snow. His mother just watches him until she's sure he'll be ok, like any worried mother would.

Eventually he makes it to the Wheeler's place where Mike, Lucas and Will are already waiting in the front yard.

"Dang, how did you get here so fast?" He pants out of breath. Will points to Jonathan's car in the driveway. There's two sleds rigged to the back on a heavy duty rope. "WHAT? And you guys made me walk

all this way?" He knows his house is out of the way, but he would've liked an invitation at least.

"Look, we have more important things to worry about right now." Mike says directing the attention towards him. The boys give him a confused look, but they're all listening. "You all heard what happened on Woodburn, right?"

"Yeah, some punks broke a few street lights and the road is closed because they've got to clean up the glass." Dustin answers quickly. "You don't think..."

"There's only one way to figure out. I say we investigate." Lucas shakes his head at Mike's proposal.

"No, no, no- no way. The upside down is over with. El closed the gate, we all saw the demodogs die, Will isn't seeing monsters anymore. Let's just leave it." Will takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

"That's not all true. I- I still see things." Everybody goes silent. "Like, people I don't remember ever seeing before, bad things, random things... I saw those lights explode."

"WAIT? So, you're saying you're like psychic now?!" Dustin thought that nothing could shock him anymore. But his normal best friend gaining supernatural powers, who's ever ready to hear that?

"How long have you been seeing things? And why didn't you tell us about it?" Mike inquires in a vexatious manner. He is clearly tired of people he trusts hiding big secrets from him.

"Since the gate closed. I didn't say a thing because I just thought they were bad dreams. They don't feel like the ones I had before. But, the lights are the only thing that actually happened in real life so far. I swear I was going to tell you guys today, I was just waiting for the right time." Everybody takes a moment to process this new information.

"What else have you dreamed of?" Dustin asks hesitantly, afraid to know the answer to his question. Will's eyes widen suddenly and his

face falls pale, not because of the cold.

"Oh my god, we have to find Steve." He starts panicky breathing.

"Harrington?" Will nods and now Dustin is freaking out. "Why the hell do we have to find him? What did you see?"

"He was there, but something bad is going to happen today if my dreams really are true. If I'm right, he's... he's at the police station right now. He'll be leaving soon though, we have to be quick!" All of the boys look at each other and then the car like their minds are working as one. They run into the house as fast as they can.

"NANCY! JONATHAN! There's something really..." Mike stops when he bursts open Nancy's bedroom door only to discover them kissing on Nancy's bed. They pull away upon seeing all of the boys in the doorway and there's a moment of awkwardness they all wish they could get back.

"MIKE! What did I tell you about knocking?" Nancy blurts out of habit.

"What's wrong?" Jonathan stands up and looks at them the same way he does when something crazy is going on. Clearly it was serious, they all look like a bomb is about to explode and they have ten seconds to disarm it.

"It's Steve, he's in danger and we don't have time to explain. We need to get to the police station; fast." Upon mention of Steve, Nancy jumps out of the bed quickly with an uneasy expression taking over her face. Too quickly for Jonathan's liking, but now was not the time for jealous feelings. Apparently, they needed to get out of here fast.

Meanwhile at the police station, Steve is just getting done describing the appearance of the shoeless mystery girl. It took a few tries, but the sketch artist finally achieved a picture that closely resembles her. Hopper thought it might be a good idea to see if El might remember her from the lab, so he snuck her into his office with a disguise. He's still trying to keep her somewhat a secret. The monsters might be gone, but the human ones haven't gone far.

"You think she was like me?" She holds the picture up, examining it closely.

"Maybe. Do you think you might recognize her?" Steve asks in a big brother voice that she somehow brought out. She shakes her head with a sigh.

"Don't remember much. But... I want to help." Steve takes the sketch back and nods sympathetically.

"Is this her?" Hopper looks up from the files he's going through. It's a file labeled experiment #9. He slides it over to Steve who carefully slides the picture out. A newspaper clipping reads of a missing child nearby. It's a younger version, but definitely the girl. He couldn't forget that face, the fierce intensity in her eyes.

"It is." Now time to be confused. "Why do you think she'd come back here?" El takes the picture, snatches the bandana she's been staring at from Steve's pocket and hurries over to the tiny antennae T.V. in the corner of the room. "What is she doing?"

"Finding her." Steve just shakes his head astonished. He thought he'd seen it all.

"She can do that?" Hopper just firmly nods in response. The T.V. is static and she appears to be just sitting there, but she's currently exploring another place in her mind. A place that Hopper and Steve can't go. After about a minute she gasps and rips off the blindfold.

"What?" They both ask simultaneously. She looks up at them with wide eyes.

"She saw me. Strong, she has to be strong." She puts her hands on her head, clearly stressed by the current events. "She's still close, by the big lake."

"You mean, the quarry?" Hopper asks and she nods.

"Yes, there." Steve stands up from the chair he was sitting in and pulls his keys from his pocket. He starts for the door with more energy than he's had all week.

"Where are you going kid?" Hopper quickly stands up as well, following him.

"We're not just going to sit around right? We need to get answers."

"Gonna be hard to get answers in a body bag. We don't know what this girl is capable of or if she's one of the bad guys. We can't just go in guns blazing." Steve tries to relax for a minute and realizes that he's right. They can't just rush this, it wouldn't be safe.

"Okay, I won't hit the quarry." He runs a hand through his hair. "I'll go home, get some food and clean up. You promise to tell me when you're ready to find her, yeah?" Hopper holds up a hand as a mock scouts honor.

"I promise. It's always good to have back up that can legally drive. And seeing as you're already involved, I don't see why you should be left out." Steve isn't one hundred percent sure he believes that Hopper will let him know when things are going down, but all he can do is take his word. He shakes his hand and gives El a nod before leaving the office.

All eyes watch him as he walks through the station. The cold air is like a slap in the face when he opens the door and walks outside. Maybe he should just go anyway. Does he really care if he gets put in harms way? What's the worst that could happen? Death? It might be nice. He's halfway to the sidewalk when a speeding car squeals to a halt in front of the station. He can't believe what he's seeing right now. Nancy, Jonathan and all of the kids (minus Max) are piled in Jonathan's car and they look like something insane just happened. Are they okay? The door bursts open and suddenly they're running frantically at him. Dustin crushes him with a hug that nearly knocks him over. He pats his back not knowing how to react.

"You're okay, thank god. We got here in time." Alright, now he's actually scared.

"Why wouldn't I be okay?" Dustin stops hugging him and Steve looks at all of them with bewilderment. "How the hell did you know I was here?"

"Will saw it. In a dream." Lucas' reply doesn't help clear up much for Steve.

"Pardon?"

"Just come with us and you'll be safe. We'll explain it all somewhere... less public." Mike says looking around nervously.

"Okay...we can go back to my place, nobody's there."

"Perfect." Will declares and they all practically drag him towards the car. Guess the quarry is out, but now what the hell is going on?